United Nations DP/2015/18

Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Office for Project Services

Distr.: General
2 April 2015

Original: English

Annual session 2015
1 - 12 June 2015, New York
Item 6 of the provisional agenda
Evaluation

Management response to the evaluation of the contribution of the global and regional Human Development Reports to the public policy process

Context and background

1. Human development is defined, in short, as a process of enlarging people's choices. Every day, human beings make a series of choices – some economic, some social, some political, some cultural. The ultimate objective of development is not to create more wealth, or to achieve a higher rate of growth, but rather to enhance this range of choices for every human being. Human development is thus people-centred.

2. Enlargement of human choices has two sides: the enhancement of people's capabilities; and improvement of their opportunities to use those capabilities. A balance between the two is essential for optimizing human development.

3. Human development is both a process and an outcome. It is concerned with the process through which choices are enlarged, but also focuses on the outcome of enhanced choices.

4. In the ultimate analysis, human development is development of the people (human resource development), development for the people (equitable distribution of development benefits) and development by the people (participatory development).

5. Human development represents a holistic approach to development. It is solidly anchored in human rights, strongly linked to human security and comprehensively encompasses gender equality and environmental sustainability.

6. This concept of human development has informed the Human Development Reports (HDRs) since 1990. The HDRs have had three concrete objectives: to contribute to extending the frontiers of analytical thinking of human development with a broader perspective of human well-being; to actively contribute to global development discourses, debates and dialogues on people-centred policies and strategies; and to pursue, for measuring development

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outcomes, assessment methodologies and tools which are not blind to broader aspects of human well-being. These all contribute to thought leadership in development by UNDP.

7. Two issues are pertinent to these objectives of the HDRs: they are independent reports with analytical and editorial independence; and they are reports to UNDP. The implications of the second point are twofold: first, UNDP can use this flagship publication for its contribution and weight in global policy spaces to ensure its thought leadership; and second, HDRs are not supposed to represent UNDP strategies or programming, which are the mandates of the UNDP strategic plan.

8. The most celebrated focus measure of human development is the Human Development Index (HDI). Given that human choices are infinite, it is recognized that at all levels of development, the three essential opportunities are for people to lead a long and healthy life, to acquire knowledge and to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living. If these essential opportunities are not available, many others remain inaccessible. The HDI captures these basic dimensions of human development.

9. However, a concept is always broader than any of its proposed measures. Any suggested measure of any concept cannot fully capture the richness and the breadth of the concept. This is true of the notion of human development as well. In principle, human choices can be infinite and change over time.

10. In this context, there are two types of measures for human development: breadth measure; and focus measure. The breadth measure, which may be termed 'human development accounting', encompasses all indicators related to human development assessments. The focus measure, which is basically composite indices, concentrates on some basic dimensions of human development. Human development accounting is required to have a comprehensive assessment of human development conditions in any society, but does not provide a single number to synthesize the state of affairs in some basic dimensions. Focus measures, which provides a single measure, are particularly suitable for advocacy and for initiating healthy competition among societies for raising awareness, but not for providing a comprehensive picture. Thus, both measures are needed for any assessment of human development in a society.

11. The HDI is not a comprehensive measure of human development. It focuses just on the basic dimensions and does not take into account a number of other important dimensions of human development. It is composed of long-term human development outcomes, and as such does not reflect the input efforts in terms of policies nor can it measure short-term human development achievements. The HDI is an average measure and thus masks a series of disparities and inequalities within countries. Disaggregation of the HDI in terms of gender, regions, races and ethnic groups can unmask the HDI, and can be and has been used widely for policy formulation. Income enters into the HDI not in its own right, but as a proxy for the resources required to have a decent standard of living.

12. The HDI thus has to be supplemented by other useful indicators in order to have a comprehensive view. It is human development accounting, not the HDI, which can portray the complete picture.

13. The HDRs contain other composite indices: the Income Inequality-adjusted HDI; Gender Inequality Index; Gender Development Index; and Multi-dimensional Poverty Index. These indices represent assessments of specific areas of achievements and gaps in human development. In that sense, they are complementary to the HDI.

14. Over time, these indices have undergone methodological changes and adjustments, based on extensive consultations with experts and on solid analytical research. The changes were done to reflect new realities and new knowledge accrued.

15. By mandate, most of the data in the composite indices are internationally standardized data from various United Nations agencies (e.g., the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, United Nations Statistics Division) and the Bretton Woods Institution (e.g., World Bank). In certain exceptional cases, some estimates and extrapolation are done in-house. All the statistical annexes present internationally standardized data to provide comparability of human development achievements between countries. The more rapidly that national statistical offices make their data available to United Nations agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions, the sooner these data can be reflected in the composite indices and statistical annexes of the HDRs. It also needs to be recognized that text boxes and tables in the HDRs draw from various sources and in those cases, comparability across countries is not an issue.

Overview of the methodology

16. The UNDP management recognizes that the evaluation has been done at an opportune moment for the HDRs; 2015 represents the twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication of the first HDR and over this period, 23 HDRs have been produced. So this is the time to reflect, evaluate and formulate the future course of action for this flagship publication of the organization. The findings, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation will guide that process. UNDP management thus welcomes the evaluation as it provides valuable insights into the effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of the HDRs and thus help to focus, their content and processes for producing them.

17. Management also recognizes the methodology of the evaluation, which combines evaluative evidence and country studies. The report has presented the analysis, findings and recommendations of the evaluation in a structured way. However, UNDP management believes that because this is the first thematic evaluation of the HDRs, if the entire period of their publication (1990-2014) had been covered by the evaluation, as opposed to the last 10 years (2004-2014), the organization would have been benefitted in terms of information and guidance from more refined findings and conclusions.

18. More concrete evidence in support of some findings would have helped UNDP management to better understand the dynamics of various issues and pursue concrete actions. Uniformity in survey methods (e.g., use of questionnaires in some cases and open-ended interviews in others) would have strengthened the methodology of the evaluation and clarity of some assertions (e.g., as in paragraph 243, which states, "The past four reports were considered as below average compared to the global HDR standards... ") would have made some of its findings credible. For example, it is not clear what an average is in this case and what global HDR standards are defined. Unfortunately, there are numerous such assertions throughout the evaluation.

19. It is the view of UNDP management that the absence of any assessment in the evaluation as to how the global HDRs have helped to broaden thinking both about the analytical frontiers of human development and about larger aspects of human well-being and how they have been instrumental in shaping thinking on global developmental goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, represents not only a missed opportunity, but also a critical omission to assess the HDRs in one of their main roles, thought leadership.

Findings and conclusions

20. Management is encouraged by some of the report's findings concerning: (a) the use of the global HDRs in the public policy processes; (b) the contributions of global HDRs in bridging the concept and application of human development to development policy; (c) the recognition of some outstanding reports that contributed to public debate and policy processes; (d) the appreciation of the advocacy value of the HDI and the sustained interest in it by policymakers, media and academics, particularly at the national level; and (e) the

recognition that the index provided an alternate development measurement that would generate discussions on the human development dimensions of public policies and global benchmarking.

21. UNDP management also welcomes some of the evaluation's conclusions that: (a) for a quarter century, the global HDRs have made major contributions to shaping the global development debate, and more specifically, that the global HDRs have made an important contribution in bringing the concept of human development to mainstream development policy; (b) a strength of the reports is their power of repetition, producing continuous annual messages on human development using different themes; and (c) General Assembly resolution 57/264 of 20 December 2002 provided editorial discretion to the Human Development Report Office (HDRO), enabling an independent process in the preparation of the report. This is a significant measure to empower the HDRs to generate human development-oriented public debate.

22. UNDP management believes that some of the findings and the conclusions of the evaluation should be contextualized appropriately and be evidence-based. The absence of such contextualization – in terms of understanding the concept of human development and its measurements, the nature of the HDRs, the processes followed in their production and dissemination, the institutional relationship between HDRO and the rest of UNDP and in some cases the absence of concrete evidence – have unfortunately resulted in incorrect findings and conclusions, as is evident in the following examples:

(a) In the case of a report like the HDR, which is produced every year, it should not be expected that every report will be avant-garde or break new ground. Some reports will excite the world and some will not; that is the nature of the product. Some reports may speak to more thematically focused audiences. Because the report is targeted to diverse constituencies (policymakers, academics, researchers, development activists, media, civil society, etc.), the degree of use, 'shelf life' and relevance of a particular HDR will vary. Management does take note of the evaluation's finding that treating any theme with a distinct human development lens in terms of concepts, measurements and policy options results in a distinctive HDR;

(b) Any report like the HDR, which has been published for 25 years, has two phases in terms of advocacy. In the initial phase, when the HDR was 'the new kid on the block', advocacy efforts were targeted to public advocacy, i.e., raising public awareness. As time passed and the report became more mature and gained wider authority, the natural focus was more on policy advocacy, i.e., how to influence policy formulation. Therefore, it is quite natural that the first type of advocacy would be overtaken by the second over time. The same is true of the HDI; over time, it would be used through disaggregation more as a policy tool rather than merely as an advocacy instrument;

(c) Various composite indices in the HDRs have distinct purposes of assessing human development achievements from different perspectives and cannot be substituted for each other. They are complementary in order to allow an understanding of human development progress from a broader perspective. It is therefore incorrect to argue that too many indices weaken their usefulness for human development discourse and their significance for public policy processes;

(d) The HDI as a composite index can be useful in policy debate and policy options only when they are disaggregated on different planes, e.g., socioeconomic groups, ethnicity and race, the rural/urban divide, gender, etc. A failure to understand this fundamental issue results in asserting that the HDI does not always generate policy debate, or it diverts attention from development disparities and inequalities instead of highlighting them;

(e) UNDP strategies and programming are mandates of the strategic plan and are not supposed to be influenced by global HDRs, which are reports to UNDP;

(f) In terms of internet searches (para. 114 of the final evaluation report), Google trends (figure 6) or citations in papers (table 7, the evaluation credits the HDR well ahead of similar publications, particularly the World Development Report. This cannot be achieved without either effective dissemination of key messages or adequate promotion of the HDR by UNDP.

23. UNDP management fully agrees with the evaluation's conclusion that the global development environment has changed significantly since the HDR was first published 25 years ago, that there are many other global publications like the HDR and as such the HDR would have to be consistently distinctive to remain relevant.

Annex. Key recommendations and management response

Recommendations related to the global Human Development Reports

Recommendation 1: Given the positive reputation, the global HDRs have the potential to keep human development on the agenda of public debate and policy process. The time is ideal to re-launch the idea of human development much more strategically, and help UNDP regain the intellectual space in the global development discourse that it once commanded. It is also recommended to address factors causing damage to the reputation of the report and its contribution.				
Management response: UNDP welcomes this recommendation and agrees that the time has come to revisit the human development paradigm in terms of concepts and measurements to ensure the thought leadership of UNDP. UNDP will initiate discussions with leading scholars in this field and commission analytical papers on rethinking human development.				
Key action(s)	**Time frame**	**Responsible unit(s)**	**Tracking**	
			Comments	**Status**
1.1 Discussion with leading scholars on human development (e.g., Nobel Laureates Prof. Amartya Sen, Prof. Joe Stiglitz, Prof. James Meade) as well as other academics and researchers in various regions of the world	By September 2015	HDRO		
1.2 Proposing the theme of HDR 2016 (the 25th HDR) as 'Human Development Revisited: Concepts and Measurements'	By September 2015	HDRO		
1.3 Commissioning analytical papers and in-house research on rethinking human development	By December 2015	HDRO, Bureau for Policy and Programme Support (BPPS)		
1.4 Global Forum on Rethinking Human Development	By December 2015	HDRO, BPPS, Bureau for External Relations and Advocacy, regional bureaux,		
Recommendation 2: UNDP should revisit the purpose of human development indices and examine their value added to the messages of the reports. Given the computation and data issues, HDRO should not proliferate the report with composite indices which have limited value.				
Management response: UNDP management acknowledges that the robustness, relevance and value added of different composite indices need to be reexamined. UNDP will address this through discussions with renowned experts in this field.				
2.1 Brainstorming with experts and statisticians and in-house discussions in the context of various regions	By September 2015	HDRO		
2.2 Roundtable on gender-related composite indices with academics, researchers and experts	By September 2015	HDRO, BPPS		
2.3 Active engagements with the *Data Revolution* initiative	By September 2015	HDRO		

Recommendation 3: There have been efforts by the HDRO in the past years to address various criticisms related to methodology of the HDI, and there have been revisions to the index. While such efforts are important, they are not sufficient to address the fundamental limitations of the index. To be able to achieve greater policy and analytical influence, consider reconstructing the HDI following a thorough review.				
Management response: UNDP management appreciates the recognition of past efforts, and recognizes the need for a review and revision of the HDI to reflect the changed realities of the development scenarios of the world. A review paper will be commissioned on the HDI and will be discussed at the Global Forum on Rethinking Human Development.				
3.1 A review paper on the HDI by an eminent human development thinker with strong quantitative skills	By November 2015	HDRO		
3.2 Global Forum on Rethinking Human Development	By December 2015			
3.3 Analytical paper on HDI with new realities	By June 2016			
Recommendation 4: UNDP should take adequate measures to enhance the influence of the global HDRs on public policy process. The role of UNDP programme units is extremely important in achieving this.				
Management response: UNDP management takes note of the recommendation and will undertake specific efforts to promote and disseminate key messages of the global HDRs.				
4.1 Ensure extensive consultation between senior management of UNDP country offices and HDRO throughout the process of preparation of HDRs.	Continuously	Regional bureaux		
4.2 Following completion of each HDR, develop and disseminate corporate policy brief on the key messages that the various programme units should pursue.	Continuously	Regional Bureaux, BPPS		
4.3 Provide advisory support to UNDP country offices in launching the global HDRs and exploring innovative processes to disseminate key messages.	Continuously	Regional bureaux, BPPS, HDRO		
Recommendation 5: The management of the global HDRs needs to be adequately strengthened to provide a stable environment for report preparation and to enhance the reputation of the reports.				
Management response: UNDP management takes note of the need for strengthened management of the HDR processes, and confirms that the organizational structure of HDRO has been streamlined and simplified with clear scope of work and accountability framework, and the HDRO management team has been newly established with clear roles and responsibilities: • A new Director with expertise in human development, historical substantive engagements with nine HDRs and institutional memory has been appointed (appointment was made in September 2014); • A team leader with substantive analytical capabilities and extensive management experience has been recruited (recruitment took place in December 2014); • The HDRO management team has been strengthened with clear responsibilities, mutually synergetic tasks and complementary roles for the Director and Deputy Director (these actions were completed in October 2014); • The organization structure of HDRO has been streamlined and simplified with clear scope of work and accountability framework (the structure				

was streamlined in December 2014).				
No action required				

Recommendations related to the regional Human Development Reports

Recommendation 1: UNDP should revisit the purpose of the regional HDRs and explore options to strengthen the contribution of the reports. The regional HDRs should not publish thematic reports unless there is something significant to talk about. It is imperative that the reports have a strong human development perspective.				
Management response: UNDP management concurs with the recommendation to revisit the overall purpose of the regional HDRs and consider the options for strengthening their contributions. UNDP management agrees that the thematic focus of regional HDRs should be driven by demand and supported by the process of consultations on the themes for greater use and impact. Regional priorities often differ from global priorities. Experience to date confirms that thematic regional HDRs served to stimulate discourse and inform policy and programming at national, regional and continental levels. These reports consistently had been framed around thematic areas pertinent to regional dialogues and firmly anchored in a human development perspective. The themes for the regional HDRs were chosen based on country-level consultations. The regional HDRs were used as an analytical and advocacy tool to promote the human development agenda as part of the Regional Programme, consistent with the priorities expressed in the strategic plan. Moreover, the human development lens and impartiality of the reports have been effectively used by UNDP to raise highly sensitive matters that few other credible policy actors were able to raise. These reports effectively focused on significant and distinctive cross-boundary and regional issues, highlighting the need for the regional public goods to address these issues, and serving as a convening power around issues of common concern. Regional HDRs aimed to enhance the development debate and actions to prioritize eradication of poverty, inequality, and exclusion. The proposed themes will be carefully selected based on regional needs to enhance the contribution of these reports while ensuring a strong human development perspective in the analysis. Building on the lessons learned from previous evaluations, experience from the previous report and feedback from stakeholders, the process for developing the regional HDRs will be further enhanced.				
Key action(s)	**Time frame**	**Responsible unit(s)**	**Tracking**	
			Comments	**Status**
1.1 Ensure that standardized processes are implemented by UNDP in conducting systemic and inclusive consultations on the relevance and significance of the themes of the regional HDRs.	Continuously	Regional bureaux		
1.2 Robust communication and outreach plan implemented to engage various stakeholders in the development of the report and monitor its use.	Continuously	Regional bureaux		
Recommendation 2: The subregional scope of the regional HDRs proved to be a useful approach both to cover issues that are specific to a few countries or subregion and also provide in-depth analysis. This approach should be thought through and adequately strategized for a greater impact of regional HDRs.				
Management response: UNDP management concurs with the recommendation and underscores that a measure of subregional analysis is an important way to enhance relevance. UNDP has consistently framed a good deal of analysis around subregional groupings, which has helped to solidify relevance and uncover key points of regional development diversity. Several ongoing subregional initiatives covering the Sahel, Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes will capitalize on these opportunities to produce specific analysis without subsuming the regional nature of the HDR and its intended audience.				
2.1 Whenever appropriate and feasible, regional	Continuously	Regional bureaux		

Human Development Reports will be supplemented by in-depth subregional-level analysis				
Recommendation 3: UNDP should take adequate measures to enhance the influence of regional HDRs on regional and national policy processes.				
Management response: UNDP management agrees with the recommendation that confirms the central objective of regional HDRs to enhance their influence on regional and national policy. UNDP has consistently complemented regional launches with national launches and/or policy workshops intended to bring together key national stakeholders to unpack the regional analysis and develop policy insights tailored to the national level. UNDP will continue to do so and scale up relevant best practices as needed. For example, to enhance the impact of regional HDRs at the national level, operational programme guidance notes were prepared for country offices for operationalizing HDR recommendations (e.g., by Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific immediately after the launch of two most recent regional HDRs in that region). Concrete measures and initiatives include establishment of regional gender and climate change fund (immediately after the launch of regional HDRs on these themes in the Asia-Pacific region) to operationalize HDRs recommendations. Before and after preparation of HDRs, the regional bureaux organized multi-stakeholder consultations and policy symposiums, and provided financial support to country offices for translating HDRs into local languages and for launching HDRs at the national level. In response to the evaluation's findings and recommendations, the regional bureaux will further review and improve the current process of conceptualizing, preparing and following up the regional HDRs, building on its strong representation in the region including the regional service centres and network of advisors, in the context of further enhancing the influence on regional and national policy processes and UNDP programming.				
3.1 Design and implement an outreach strategy that engages country offices and regional service centres in dissemination and follow up of impact of the HDRs.	By December 2015	Regional bureaux, BPPS		